DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 100 971 88 TM 004 088

AUTHOR Saif, Philip S.
TITLE On Evaluation: For Members of Boards of Education.
INSTITUTION Capitol Region Education Council, West Hartford, Conn.
SPONS AGENCY Bureau of Elementary and Secondary Education (DHEW/OE), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE 74
NOTE 21p.; For related documents, see TM 004 087, 092, and 110

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Boards of Education; Decision Making; *Evaluation; Objectives; *Personnel Evaluation; Program Evaluation; Self Evaluation; Teacher Evaluation
IDENTIFIERS Elementary Secondary Education Act Title III; ESEA Title III; *Project Evaluation

ABSTRACT

The definition and purposes of evaluation are explained in this booklet addressed to members of boards of education. Evaluation provides information to the school board enabling them to make decisions about goals, personnel, administrators, and programs. Some guidelines are offered regarding responsibility in personnel and student evaluation. (SM)

ED 100971
EP 100 971

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PROJECT EVALUATION

Capitol Region Education Council

ON EVALUATION:

FOR MEMBERS OF BOARDS OF EDUCATION

Philip S. Saif

TM 004 088

This booklet has been prepared with
E.S.E.A Title III funds

1974

PREFACE

This booklet has been prepared by the Capitol Region Education Council to provide Boards of education with some basic information about evaluation in education.

The contents of this booklet focus more on the *"What"* and *"Why"* of evaluation, than on the *"How."* There are many materials at CREC which provide more detailed information on the process involved in carrying out an evaluation. Consultant help is also available at CREC.

The topic of evaluation is complex. A booklet of this nature is not meant to provide a comprehensive picture of evaluation. This booklet is concerned with some questions on evaluation raised by some Board members.

Readers needing or wanting more detailed information are referred to the CREC Evaluation Center.

To the Members of Boards of Education who responded to the Center's invitation, to those who read the manuscript and reacted, and to Larry Benedict, who helped with his discussions, I would like to express my thanks.

Philip S. Saif, Director
Project Evaluation

The concept of evaluation is a central concern to everyone involved in education. Educators have always been concerned with these five points of evaluation: *Why* to evaluate, *What* to evaluate, *When* to evaluate, *How* to evaluate and *Who* to evaluate. Traditionally, the concept of "evaluation" has been used interchangeably with that of "testing" and everyone is familiar with testing, beginning with the tests he took in first grade and continuing throughout his school career.

Recently, however, many educators have begun to feel that simple testing and test scores are not sufficient to meet education's needs or to make educational decisions. This booklet will focus on this concept and explore in more detail some of the topics of evaluation.

The Purpose of Evaluation

Evaluation is done to collect specific information about a particular enterprise to facilitate decision-making to enable the operation of that enterprise to meet its goals. For example, an evaluation might be undertaken to see if an experimental high school geography program is meeting its stated goals

which are: (a) to teach more geography skills, (b) to teach map skills to slow learners, (c) to save money. When the program is in operation, information (data) is systematically collected to see if the program is meeting its goals. If the geography course is supposed to teach map skills to slow learners, *is it* teaching map skills to slow learners?

Once this information is collected, a decision or set of decisions can be made about the program. If the data show that the slow learners have mastered the required skills, a decision might be made to keep the program. If it were a pilot program, a decision might be made to expand it. Conversely, if the program failed to meet the expectations set for it, a decision might be made to modify it, or drop it entirely.

The collection of information to make decisions about a particular program, a staff, an administrator, or even a School Board, is the purpose for doing any evaluation. Systematic evaluation allows a decision maker or decision-makers (e.g., a School Board) to base decisions on data rather than on personal feelings, intuitions, or vague and general reviews by others.

Evaluation can provide data to a School Board facing the following

questions:

1. About an administrator: Is the administrator doing the job he is supposed to be doing? Is the job being done well? Is the job being fulfilled in a manner consistent with the goals of the School Board; of the community? Is the job being done the way the Board wants it to be done?

2. About the Board itself: Is the Board doing the job it is supposed to be doing? Is it doing its job well? Is it accomplishing what it wants? Is it simply acting as a group? Is it operating with consistency? Has the Board identified the job specification of the Superintendent?

3. About programs: Is a given program meeting its goals? Does an experimental program need a little more, a lot more, or no more support in order to work? Should the program be kept? Expanded? Modified?

The purpose of evaluation in each of the examples given above is to collect data which will help yield better decisions. In these cases the Board is the decision-maker, and in each case particular information is

needed to make decisions. Information concerning an administrator would not be the same as information regarding a particular program. Therefore, data must be collected giving precise information concerning points determined to be important.

Some Basic Elements of Evaluation

Whether evaluation is to collect data about programs, personnel, or some other aspect of an educational system, the evaluation will have certain basic elements. These elements can be phrased as questions, and the process of answering these questions comprises some of the basic steps of evaluation.

Step 1

Why is it necessary to have evaluation?

Any Board of education is making decisions. These decisions concern budget, personnel, and programs. In order that a Board can make sound judgments, relevant data must be presented.

Step 2

What is to be evaluated?

A clear definition of the enterprise to be evaluated must be given. Is it a new program, the Superintendent, or a set of materials? Often, when asked what is to be evaluated, an educational decision-maker may respond, *"the school,"* or *"the elementary program,"* or *"the English program."* A school, or an elementary program or an English program are comprised of many different elements: materials, students, personnel, etc. A clear definition of what is to be evaluated becomes the crucial starting point.

Step 3

For whom is the operation of an enterprise to be evaluated?

For any given enterprise, there are a number of decision-makers, each making different kinds of decisions. A Board makes different decisions about the Superintendent than does a faculty; therefore, each would want different data for making their respective decisions. If the enterprise were a new geography course, an evaluation could be done from the

viewpoint of several different decision-makers: the teachers teaching it, the students taking it, the principal in whose building it is being implemented, the Board who authorized funds for it.

An evaluation done for the teachers of the course would provide data for use in making instructional decisions. However, these data would not necessarily be useful for a School Board, which would be making decisions on a different level. Most traditional evaluations do not provide for different decision--makers with different needs. Therefore, part of the evaluation process should be the identification of the various decision-makers and a determination of the primary decision-maker for whom the evaluation will be made.

Step 4

What are the goals of the enterprise?

Once it has been determined what is to be evaluated and for whom it is to be evaluated, it is necessary to determine the goals held for the enterprise. Goal setting becomes an important part of the evaluation process.

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A math program cannot be evaluated unless the goals held for it are clearly specified. A Superintendent cannot be evaluated unless the goals of his job are clearly stated. In fact, a Board cannot evaluate itself, or determine if it is working satisfactorily, if it has not clearly stated its goals.

Without identifying goals, it is literally impossible for a School Board to evaluate effectively and systematically, its schools, its programs, its personnel or its own operation. One cannot determine whether something, or someone is doing well, if goals have never been identified and stated clearly and correctly.

Unfortunately, goals tend to be expressed as vague concepts: *"good citizens," "great Superintendent," "good school system," "individualized learning."* These goals are too general for meaningful data collection. The decision-makers must take these goals and make them more specific.

Decision-making by the Board is greatly hindered by the failure to identify and establish priorities on its goals. Without priorities, decision-making becomes a process of individuals acting intuitively and

inconsistently, leading to an attitude on the part of the community or the school personnel of, *"Well, what will they do next?"* In the final instance, a Board is accountable to the community, but if the Board never establishes concrete objectives, it can never say to the community that it has accomplished its purpose.

It should be emphasized that the Board must actually identify its own goals. It is the Board's right, and indeed responsibility, to determine its goals as well as the uses to which data collected will be put.

Step 5

When is evaluation done?

Evaluation is a continuous process. Evaluation that begins and stops at a particular period of time is not a complete evaluation. An important part of the evaluation is the feedback to the original goals or objectives to check whether or not such goals should be modified, deleted, or left as they are. Evaluation must be a continuous process.

Step 6

How is evaluation performed?

This booklet is not intended to elaborate on this point. However, the various methods used in evaluations include: scales, lists, questionnaires, opinionnaires, tests, video tapes, audio tapes, etc. This depends upon what is to be evaluated.

Step 7

What is done with the data?

Decision-making. Once data are collected and presented *as objectively as possible*, the decision-maker(s) (here they are the members of the Board) will make their decision(s). The decision(s) will be based upon the collected information.

Caution must be used related to decision-making. For example, if Board members came to a conclusion that the Superintendent should leave, this should not be interpreted that the educational programs he introduced are bad. Each component of the system must have its identity, even if there is an obvious relationship.

The reverse is also true; i.e., a program that proved to be of no

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value in meeting the goals of education in a particular community does not necessarily mean that the Superintendent is bad (at fault). Appropriate evaluation of personnel is a major task of a School Board.

1. *Superintendent Evaluation*

How to evaluate the Superintendent is one of the common problems facing Board members. One of the problems in Superintendent evaluation is that in too many cases goals for the Superintendent are not clearly and specifically set forth.

When asked how he evaluates his Superintendent, one Board member replied that his yearly evaluation of the Superintendent is: *"Gee, I think you are doing a tremendous job. I want to vote to renew your contract."*

His "evaluation" is based on feelings and emotions, or simply a matter of likes and dislikes, and he expresses his frustration with this approach. Decisions are often based on criteria such as being a neat dresser, being charming, not "rocking the boat." Needless to say, this is not a very systematic evaluation.

Usually there are more substantive goals held for the Superintendent. Such goals or criteria should be clearly stated, and everyone involved should be aware of them. Goals and standards of performance should be set by the Board, with the Superintendent.

2. *Personnel Evaluation*

Personnel evaluation is another crucial element in the educational evaluation process. Like Superintendent evaluation, it has certain basic elements: "personnel" to be evaluated; goals for the personnel; objectives to meet the goals; and a decision-maker for whom the evaluation is made.

Two issues arise, both from the perspective of Board members and from the perspective of teachers:

(a) Who is responsible for personnel evaluation, and

(b) How is evaluation different from "rating."

(a) Responsibility. Ultimately, in any public school district, the

School Board is responsible for personnel evaluation. However, there are other levels of responsibility involved in carrying out such evaluation:

(1) The Superintendent: The Board will probably be directly responsible for evaluation of the Superintendent.

(2) Principals and administrators: These persons are probably the direct responsibility of the Superintendent. It is reasonable for a Board to expect to be told the criteria which the Superintendent uses to evaluate principals and other administrators. The School Board, as a group, should know the criteria used to evaluate administrators. This does not mean that the Board needs to get involved in the evaluation of each staff member. It does mean that they should take some interest in establishing the goal setting phase of the evaluation process.

(3) Teachers: The Board should be expected to participate in the establishment of criteria to make teacher evaluation relevant to the goals of the educational system. Failure to

do this invites a good deal of inconsistency into a system. This becomes obvious at contract time of year when a Board is usually presented with a list of names for tenure, rehiring or dismissal. Some Board members have expressed frustration with such a process. They have raised such questions as:

What criteria were used to make these recommendations?

Are they consistent with the goals of the school district?

Are they consistent with future plans?

Are they consistent with what the Board wants?

Each of these questions should be seriously examined and approved by the Board before an evaluation takes place.

(b) Evaluation as "rating": One of the most common complaints raised by teachers and administrators alike is that personnel evaluation is little more than a popularity contest, a "rating" based, at best, on very vague criteria. This implies that

the evaluation is not tied to any goals, but simply provides an index of comparison with respect to other teachers in the system, or with respect to the experience of the evaluator. However, ratings could be a part of an on-going and systematic diagnostic evaluation process.

Evaluation must be an on-going process. It cannot occur once or twice a year and have any real meaning. It must provide data from which decisions can be made in order to improve instruction. There must not be only one evaluation; rather a series of different data collection techniques must be used by a variety of different people, possibly including the teacher himself.

Answers to three questions -- *What is to be evaluated, for whom,* and *what are the goals* -- form the first part of an evaluation. It is a crucial part and often overlooked. Once these three steps have been completed, data collection begins.

How are the data generated?

Once goals have been defined, there must be a design for data collection procedures, and a report to the decision-maker. Any evaluation would have these basic elements in

common. Judgments about the enterprise, based on data, can then be made by the decision-maker. Since this is not a "how to" booklet, this topic will not be presented in detail here.

A related issue has been raised by some Board members: *How do elections which change the make-up of a Board affect the educational goals held by the Board?*

Granted, a School Board election can greatly change the make-up of the committee: Two points should be made however:

(1) Certain goals are unlikely to change, even with a new election. Such goals might include: wanting children to be able to read, write, do basic computation, perform certain physical activities. In other words, even if a completely new committee is elected, some goals will remain the same. Once these goals have been clearly established, they are likely to remain unchanged, regardless of elections.

(2) Some goals or priorities on goals are bound to change, even if Board elections do not change the make-up of the

committees. The Board should have a procedure for a periodic review of goals, regardless of change. After all, educational goals are likely to change to a certain extent, simply because of changing times and attitudes.

Should the Board members be involved in student evaluation?

The Board should confine itself to drawing the policy, and leave the details to the professional educators. For example, the Board, upon gathered information, finds that using Criterion-Referenced Tests will be of more value than Norm-Referenced Tests. Therefore, a policy to use Criterion-Referenced Tests should be written and the Superintendent charged with implementing it.

Conclusion

Evaluation is meant to serve decision-makers by providing data to help them improve their decision-making. It is meant to help educators determine how well they are doing something with the purpose of improving it; be it programs, personnel, student learning, or Board

operation. Part of the overall purpose of improving education is improving its various parts or components.

Given the increasing pressures on, and demands for resources; given the need for program and personnel accountability in the face of limited resources; evaluation has become an increasingly important decision-making tool.